

Psalm 63

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 August 2013

Preacher: Greg Hendrickson

[0 : 00] Well, good morning. Would you turn with me in your Bible to Psalm 63? So we're continuing our summer series through the second section of the Psalms.

Psalm 63, it's found on page 479 if you're looking in one of the Pew Bibles. Psalm 63, a psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah.

O God, you are my God. Earnestly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you. My flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live. In your name I will lift up my hands.

My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips when I remember you upon my bed and meditate on you in the watches of the night. For you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings to you. Your right hand upholds me. But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth.

They shall be given over to the power of the sword. They shall be a portion for jackals. But the king shall rejoice in God. All who swear by him shall exult. For the mouths of liars will be stopped. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for this psalm that David wrote so long ago. And we pray that you would speak to us through these words here today. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[2 : 08] Amen. It's known as the toughest foot race in the world. The 135-mile Badwater Ultramarathon has happened every year since 1977 on July 15 in Death Valley National Park. The race starts 280 feet below sea level. Continues over three mountain ranges to finish at 8,350 feet above sea level for a cumulative vertical ascent of 13,000 feet. The average high temperature in Death Valley in July is 116 degrees.

This year, 96 competitors from 22 nations attempted the run. 81 finished it within 48 hours. The winner finished 135 miles in a little less than 24 hours. Now that's five regular marathons back to back.

Most of us, it's hard to even imagine what's involved in such a feat. Right? Training to survive 100 plus degree temperatures in the middle of the desert with the sun beating down on you, running five marathons and climbing the equivalent of three or four mountains in the course of pulling an all-nighter or two. It's intense. Far beyond almost all of our daily experience. Now the psalm we're looking at this morning is also intense. And it's vivid.

Beyond most of our daily experience. Even the setting of the psalm is intense. It says it was written when David was in the wilderness of Judah. Now the wilderness of Judah is the land east of Jerusalem sloping down toward the Dead Sea. And it's a place with less than two inches of rain that fall every year. Summer temperatures above 100 degrees. It's so dry that the land is often cracked because the soil is so dry. And David was hiding out there most likely because his son Absalom had staged a coup and taken over the throne from him. And he was fleeing for his life.

But even more than the setting or David's personal circumstances, we see in this psalm a vivid picture of biblical spirituality or what it looks like to seek after God and be satisfied in God. David begins by saying, Oh God, you are my God. Earnestly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you. My flesh faints for you.

[4 : 57] As in a dry and weary land where there's no water. David's life is oriented around pursuing God. The way that a runner's life is oriented around preparing for a marathon. From morning to night, everything that a serious runner does, from the food they eat, to their exercise regime, to their sleeping schedule, is oriented around the goal of training for the race.

And in a similar way, David's life was oriented around seeking God from morning to night. He says in verse 1, Earnestly I seek you. The verse is sometimes translated, Early I will seek you.

Either way, the point is that he's seeking God without delay, without procrastination, without hesitation, without distraction, without half-heartedness.

Excuse me. When I was in college, one of the few groups of people who woke up early on a consistent basis were some of the varsity athletes who had early morning running or lifting or rowing sessions.

And they organized their daily schedule around their commitment to pursuing their sport. They fit in their classes in that schedule and their training and went to bed at a reasonable hour.

[6 : 22] And as a result, they were more disciplined than most other students in how they spent their time. Because they had a driving passion around which the rest of their life was organized.

And in a similar way, David's passion for seeking after God drives and motivates his life from morning to night. Verse 1 talks about seeking the Lord early.

Verse 6 talks about late at night when he's laying in his bed in the middle of the night and he can't get to sleep. And he says, I remember you upon my bed and I meditate on you in the watches of the night.

For David, God is the food that he eats, the water that he drinks, the air that he breathes, and the peace in which he can lie down and sleep.

David's relationship with God is characterized both by intensity and by persistence. Like a person living in the desert, seeking after life-giving, refreshing, energizing water.

[7 : 26] If he doesn't find it, he'll perish. But you know, David isn't just making a one-time emergency request.

He's not just turning to God out of desperate circumstances until his life gets smoothed out again.

Verse 2 says, I've looked upon you in the sanctuary. In other words, in the tabernacle in Jerusalem when the people of God would gather together to worship and where he was king and where things were going well, he said, I have looked upon your power and glory.

So the circumstances don't really matter whether David's all alone in the wilderness of Judah or whether he's surrounded by God's people in the city of Jerusalem.

His life is focused around seeking after God. But you know, he doesn't just seek after God. He also finds great satisfaction in God.

Verse 5 says, My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips. Now literally that verse 5 says my soul will be satisfied as with marrow and fatness.

[8 : 40] And now that phrase doesn't strike us in exactly the same way that it would have struck an ancient Israelite. Because we live in a culture that has an ambivalent relationship to fat.

Now, in one sense, we do love fat. We probably eat too much of it. But in another sense, we always hear, we're constantly hearing messages that fat is bad for you and so you should buy skim milk instead of whole milk and buy chicken breasts that are 99% lean instead of drumsticks.

Right? And all kinds of fat-free, low-fat products. But, although the diet trends are always changing and conflicting so you don't always hear the same advice depending on who you're listening to. But for an ancient Israelite, their daily food would have been bread and grains for the most part with maybe a little bit of olive oil or a little bit of very watered-down wine and some dried fruit.

In some seasons of the year, they might have vegetables during certain growing seasons or harvest seasons or milk from sheep and goats. But for the most part, they ate bread.

That's what sustained them from day to day. Now, meat, on the other hand, meat was a delicacy.

Most people ate meat a few times a year. Maybe at weddings or at the major Jewish feasts or when an important guest came to your house.

[10 : 04] The only place where meat was served every single day of the year was the king's table. And so for most people, meat was a special treat.

And they really enjoyed eating it. And in the Israelite culture, everybody knew that the best part of the meat was the fat and juicy parts. Because they weren't just tasty, they were satisfying.

They made you feel full in a way that just eating bread and some vegetables wouldn't. And so David says here in verse 5, My soul finds such satisfaction in the Lord.

It's like I've just eaten the best meal I could think of. The best meal known to man. I couldn't ask for anything else. I'm satisfied.

I'm nourished. I'm strengthened to face the day. I'm gladdened. I have joy in my heart. That's the kind of deep satisfaction that he experienced in God.

[11:07] And then he goes on to say, My mouth will praise you with joyful lips. You know, isn't that what you naturally do when you have a great meal? Right? You want to tell somebody else and invite them to come with you to this awesome new restaurant that just opened, that has this awesome food.

Or if you're at somebody else's house, you just start giving, gushing with compliments to the cook. Not just because you're trying to be polite, but because you're really enjoying the food that they've carefully prepared for you.

And in the same way, when we're satisfied in the Lord, we praise Him not just because we're trying to be polite and do our duty and we feel like we have to, but because we want to.

Because we're so satisfied in Him that we want to praise Him and we want to thank Him and we want to tell other people how awesome He is. And invite them to taste and see that He's good.

So we see in this psalm this vivid picture of seeking God and being satisfied in God. Now, of course, the question that it raises for us is what about our relationship with God?

[12:23] Does it look anything like this? Does this characterize our approach toward God? Seeking and being satisfied in Him.

Well, maybe you're here today. Maybe you're not a Christian. Or maybe you're not sure what you believe. Maybe you would say that you're a spiritual seeker. Let me challenge you with a question. Are you seeking God at your own pace and on your own terms? Are you seeking a God that fits you? A God who affirms you as you are and doesn't demand that you change in any way that you don't already want to change.

If the God described in this psalm exists, He's not someone to simply be pursued at your own pace like a summer hobby or an extracurricular or an enrichment activity.

This God is someone who calls you to reorient your whole life, your feeling, your thinking, your desires, your decisions around Him like a potential marriage partner even more.

[13:33] A long time ago, the Cambridge professor, C.S. Lewis, wrote the following. He said, people are reluctant to cross over from the notion of an abstract deity, an abstract idea of God to the living God.

An abstract idea of God does nothing, demands nothing. He's there if you wish for Him, like a book on a shelf. He will not pursue you.

But with the God of the Bible, it's different. He says, it is always shocking to meet life where we thought we were alone. Look, we say, it's alive.

This is the very point at which so many people draw back. I would have done so myself if I could and proceed no further with Christianity. An impersonal God, well and good.

a subject of God, of beauty, truth and goodness that exists in our own head. Better still, a formless life force surging through us, a vast power that we can tap into best of all.

[14:43] But God Himself, alive, pulling at the other end of the cord, perhaps approaching at an infinite speed, the hunter, the king, the husband, that is quite another matter.

He says, there comes a moment when people who have been dabbling in religion, man's search for God, suddenly draw back, supposing we really found Him.

We never meant it to come to that. Worse still, supposing He had found us. Let me urge you, do not draw back from the living God who is seeking after you.

It can be the scariest thing in the world, but at the same time, it is potentially the most liberating thing in the world because the Bible seeks of a God who seeks us and who draws us to seek after Him, who puts an unquenchable thirst in our mouths that will only be satisfied in Him.

Long ago, another man said, Lord, You have made us for Yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You. And Jesus Christ said, Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest for your souls.

[16:03] So if you're seeking the truth, keep seeking until you find it. Seek Jesus because perhaps He is already seeking you and drawing you into a living relationship with Him.

But now for those of us who are Christians, for those of us who would say, Yes, I believe in Jesus, I've come to Him. What about us? What do we seek after with intensity, with persistence?

Well, many of us seek after success in our studies or in our career. Right? Especially here in New England, work and school demand a lot of time.

They demand often not just weekdays, but also evenings and weekends and traveling away from home. They demand energy to develop new skills and face difficult situations and sometimes

navigate difficult relationships with coworkers or fellow students.

School demands money, too. Now, most of us are willing to meet those demands for time, energy, and even money because we really want to succeed in our work.

[17 : 18] Or many of us want to stay in shape or to get in shape. And so we're motivated to go to the gym early in the morning or to take long walks before the weather gets too hot or play a sport.

We arrange our schedules around these things because we value them highly and we find joy when our health is improving. Some of us are invested in building a marriage or raising a family.

Huge investments that are constantly demanding and at the same time immensely rewarding. And all of these things are worthy pursuits. But do we pursue God who is supremely worthy with even greater intensity and even greater persistence?

Do we pursue God not just on the side, in addition to pursuing our work, pursuing our health, pursuing our relationships, but do we pursue our work and pursue our health and pursue our relationships in order to display the glory of God and out of thankfulness and love for Him who created all these things?

Do we joyfully praise God and freely speak of Him to others because we found such deep satisfaction in Him? No, for most of us, if we're honest, the answer is no.

[18 : 42] Or at least, not consistently. Maybe we have occasional bursts of spiritual intensity. We pray and seek God's help in a time of crisis followed by long periods of complacency when our life is going fairly smoothly.

You know, if we think about our normal daily routine, from morning to night, we often go through it with little thought for God. Right? And it's hard. We drag ourselves out of bed in the morning, stumble into the shower, go through the motions, get ourselves out the door to work or to class or start taking care of the kids.

Our days are busy, full of work, full of activity. If we can, we include some things that are pleasurable, whether it's a nice, a good cup of coffee, watching a movie or a play or getting together with some friends.

And then finally, at the end of the day, we get into bed and fall asleep. And then if we can't fall asleep right away or if we wake up in the middle of the night, our thoughts range from all the things I need to do tomorrow, anxiety over difficult relationships, guilt from past failures, fear of future disappointments, frustration at our inability to get back to sleep and the prospect of going through another day tired.

It's hard. Even just to live from day to day, to just make it. Then where does God fit into all this?

[20 : 12] Right? Maybe we want to follow God. We want Him to be the center of our life so we come to church on Sundays. Maybe we pray before meals or go to a small group in the middle of the week or spend a few minutes praying and reading the Bible in the morning at some time of day but still, if we're honest, our life is far from being saturated with this seeking after God and being satisfied in Him.

And that picture that we have in this psalm, it's sort of like the picture of the ultramarathon, 135 miles through the middle of the desert. That's very admirable for those 81 people who could do it. And that's not something I am ever going to try to do. It just seems completely impossible and unrealistic for me in my circumstances.

I mean, do you feel that way? I feel that way often. Our passion for God is like a leaky bucket. It's constantly losing water until it gets filled up again.

Well, the good news is that this psalm doesn't just give us a picture of somebody else who is seeking God and being satisfied in Him. And it doesn't just give us a standard to measure ourselves against.

[21 : 29] That's what we've seen so far. A picture of someone seeking God and being satisfied in Him. A standard to measure ourselves against. The good news is this psalm points us to the resources that we need to experience this ourselves.

To seek God and to be satisfied in Him on a daily basis. Now look down at what David says. We've looked mostly at the first half of the psalm, verses 1 through 6.

But look down at what David says in verses 5 through 7. He starts by saying, my soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food. He goes on, when I remember you on my bed. And then in verse 7 he says, for, or because, you have been my help.

In other words, the reason that David is satisfied in the Lord is because God has been His help in the past. And then look down at verse 8.

David says, my soul clings to you, but your right hand upholds me. It's a picture of a fearful child holding on to his daddy's side for dear life.

[22 : 41] But his daddy has his right hand, his strong arm around him. And daddy will not let his child go. He holds him close. So David said, God has been my help in the past and God upholds me in the present.

And then verse 9 through 11, David speaks of God's promise for the future. He says, those who seek to destroy my life will go down into the depths of the earth. But the king will rejoice in God. In other words, David's enemies who were fighting against God's purpose would not have the last word. God will surely be victorious. So David points us to these three things that are the fuel for a life of seeking and being satisfied in God.

These three things, God's help in the past, God's hand in the present, and God's promise for the future. And David experienced all these things. But you know, you and I can experience these things in an even fuller measure than David did.

Because Jesus Christ came to give us these three things in an even more profound way than David ever could have seen.

[24 : 00] In Jesus Christ, we see that God has come to be our helper. That He has helped us in the past. And the Hebrew word, and you know, that doesn't just mean that He sort of threw you a few bones along the way.

You know, sort of gave you a few nice things in life. But the word helper in Hebrew means someone who comes alongside you, who joins with you, who stands by you with unwavering loyalty, and does for you what you could not do for yourself.

That's why it's described, used to describe a marriage partner in the Old Testament. as well as a military ally. Right? But the point is, this is exactly what Jesus did.

Jesus came alongside us. He lived with us on this earth. He joined Himself to us. He took on our human nature. He was tempted in every way, just as we are.

And yet, He never sinned. And He loved us and stood by us with unfailing loyalty. It says He loved His disciples to the end.

[25 : 10] Even to the point of dying for us on the cross. Right? Doing for us what we could never do for ourselves. And when Jesus died on the cross, He paid the price for our sin so that we might be forgiven and free from condemnation.

Jesus became ours so that we might become His. so that we might be able to say God has been my helper. He has come alongside me. He has joined Himself to me in Jesus Christ and He has done for me what I could never do for myself.

And He has stood by me with unfailing loyalty. Like a true friend. A true ally. A true helper.

And when we see that, when we see the price that He paid, to become our helper, we see that it's so futile and foolish to live for ourselves.

It's so empty to chase after things in this world that are just going to pass away and crave things that just satisfy us for a moment. And we see that He is worthy because He's the one who has stood by us more than anyone else.

[26 : 32] And so when we see that, we begin to have this desire to live for Him and to organize our schedule around Him and to orient our life around Him from early in the morning until the middle of the night.

To seek Him with intensity and with persistence because He is our greatest ally and He has met our greatest need. So in Jesus we see that God has been our help in the past, but in Jesus we also see that God upholds us in the present.

Through Jesus Christ we have a Father in Heaven who holds us in His mighty right hand and He will not let us go. He is holding you in the midst of sleepless nights, in the midst of oppressive heat, in the midst of a cancer diagnosis, in the midst of chronic pain, in the midst of a mental breakdown, in the midst of unemployment, in the midst of loneliness, in the midst of persecution, in the midst of all the other troubles that we experience in this world and all the deserts that we have to walk through.

But Jesus said to His disciples, Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. Just as David says in verse 7, Rest in the shadow of His wings.

[28 : 14] He is holding you with His mighty right hand. In Jesus Christ, God upholds you in the present. And finally, in Jesus Christ we have God's promise for the future that everyone and everything that opposes God will be overthrown.

That sin and Satan and death will not have the last word. We read this earlier from Revelation chapter 7.

The promise that one day we will stand before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in the shelter of His presence. And on that day it says we will hunger no more nor thirst anymore because Jesus, the Lamb, in the midst of the throne, He will be our shepherd and He will guide us to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

can you even imagine that God will come to you that He upholds you in His mighty right hand and He'll never let you go and He'll come to you with the tenderness of a mother wiping the tears from her child's face.

And all our thirst and all our longing and all our seeking after God will be one day forever satisfied in His presence and will delight in Him for all eternity.

[29 : 54] This is what we have in Jesus Christ that gives us the fuel for a life of seeking and being satisfied in the Lord.

And today we're just about to come to the Lord's table to celebrate communion. And as we do that we're invited to experience that future promise breaking into our present reality.

So as we prepare to eat the bread and drink the cup together we're going to pray and ask that Jesus would come and dwell among us here by His Holy Spirit and even lift us up into His presence so that our souls would be satisfied and nourished and strengthened and glad and glad.

Psalms 34 says taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him. Let's pray. O merciful Lord we do not come to this your table trusting in our own righteousness but in your abundant and great mercies.

Lord we are not even worthy to eat the crumbs under your table but you have come. You have been our help. You uphold us in the present and you have given us a glorious promise for the future.

[31 : 34] You delight in showing mercy. So grant us therefore gracious Lord so to eat this bread and drink this cup that we may evermore dwell in you and delight in you and desire you.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.